



Understand Your Unconscious Biases and Take Steps to Reduce Them

Our biases can cloud our judgment and cause us to make sub-standard decisions or hold onto irrational beliefs. We must train ourselves to actively fight against it.

Unconscious biases are stereotypes and attitudes we accumulate through life that influence the way we view and judge other people.

Types of Unconscious Bias:

- **Affinity bias** is the unconscious tendency to get along with others who are like us-- it's easier to socialize and spend time with people who are **not** different.
- A **Beauty bias** occurs when we give better treatment to people who are physically attractive, and judge them as smarter, healthier, more competent, and superior to those who are perceived as less attractive.
- **Confirmation** bias is our tendency to subconsciously look for any evidence that backs up our preconceived opinions of somebody.
- **Conformity bias** rears its ugly head when we choose to conform to social or group norms rather than pursue a new, better idea that would disrupt accepted norms. People often choose to conform because it is easier to follow a path established, reinforced or protected by others rather than create a different one.
- The **Halo effect** causes our overall impression of a person ("He is nice!") to be positively influenced by how we feel and think about a single standout quality ("He's a great businessman").
- The **Horn effect** causes our overall impression of a person to be negatively influenced by a single trait.

**The best defense against the horns & halo effect is to always adhere to one rule:
Every idea must stand on its own merit, regardless of who proposes it.**

4 Simple Ways to Reduce Personal Biases:

- (1) Engage people from different backgrounds and cultures
- (2) Ensure everyone on your team or under your influence gets heard
- (3) Ask questions rather than make assumptions
- (4) Go online, take an Implicit Association Test, ponder results, and start conversations with colleagues, family and friends <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>
How strongly do you associate certain stereotypes to specific groups?

Questions for Reflection:

- What do the people you feel most comfortable with in life & work have in common?
- How can you improve connections with people you feel less comfortable around?
- When is your next opportunity to actively seek a different point of view?
- Who may not always be heard at work, school, home, community... why?
- When was the last time someone incorrectly assumed something about your preferences, capabilities, or background? ...If they had asked a question instead, would it have been more productive?

There are many online resources to help us understand and reduce unconscious bias. Here is one: <https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/avoiding-unconscious-bias.htm>